

## **DCF initiatives continue forward**

The state's care and treatment of children at risk continues to improve and that's reassuring for all Connecticut citizens.

The state's strategy to open more group homes and provide community services to enhance the care of foster children is working, according to a federal monitor's latest report on DCF.

Less than 11 percent of the 6,000 abused and neglected children in the care of DCF were housed in large, expensive residential treatment centers as of June 30, according to the report from monitor Raymond Mancuso.

That's extremely significant because 11 percent is the level set as one of 22 goals DCF must reach before the state can free itself of a federal court order that has pretty much dictated the state agency's operations since 1991.

At that time, DCF was placed under federal monitoring because the courts rated its performance poor in meeting the needs of at-risk children.

The cost of overhauling DCF and its operations during the past 15 years has run into hundreds of millions of dollars for state taxpayers.

However, the expense has also brought a proper level of care and treatment for the abused and neglected youth, which cannot be measured in terms of dollars.

Mancuso's report shows that in the past two years, DCF has reduced the number of children placed in large, congregate facilities by 3 percent. He termed the decrease an "immense achievement" for DCF.

In recent years, DCF has been making good headway in meeting the 22 goals. Mancuso reported that for the quarter of April 1 to June 30, the agency had met 15 of the 22 performance goals set for it.

This latest success has come from a welcomed new strategy of opening group homes for the children. DCF opened 24 group homes in the past year, with another 24 scheduled to open in this fiscal year. Group homes lower the cost of placing children in large residential treatment centers, especially if they are located out of state. More important, the foster and group homes allow the state to provide community support services that are far more beneficial for the children.